DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 572 EA 028 888

TITLE	From Schoolhouse to Statehouse--Re:Learning 1988-1995. State Leadership for Learning.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
PUB DATE	1997-08-00
NOTE	41p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427 ($9.50 plus $3 postage and handling; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Change Strategies; *Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Politics of Education; Program Descriptions; *Program Effectiveness; School Restructuring

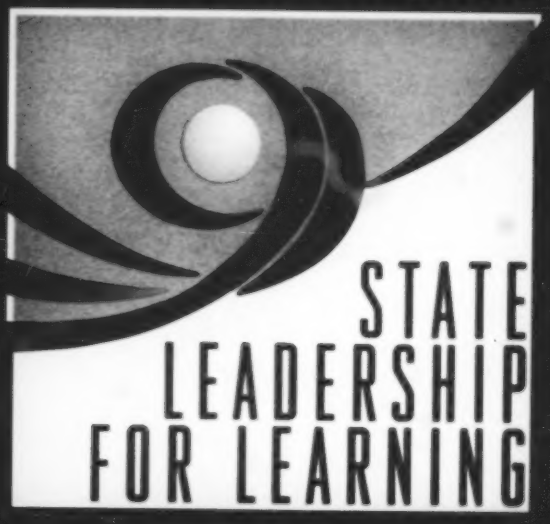
ABSTRACT

In 1988, the Education Commission of the States and Coalition of Essential Schools joined forces to create Re:Learning, which aimed to change the education system and bring about improved learning for all students. This report describes the development and implementation of the program and focuses on program influences on student achievement and policymaking. Identified on the various forces working for and against the success of such initiatives at the state, district, and school levels. The obstacles at the state and local levels, such as a disjointed policy environment, unstable funding, turnover in political leadership, and a lack of understanding and support from important constituencies are also discussed. The program has spread, growing from 56 schools in 1988 to 935 schools in 1995, registering an impact that ranged from higher expectations for students to shared decision making in the educational community. Teachers and principals reported lower absenteeism and higher graduation rates; schools that redesigned curriculum around the program's principles declared gains in students' test scores. Educational policy was likewise affected, with a shift toward greater flexibility for restructuring schools and other innovative measures. Contains 12 references. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 572

FROM SCHOOLHOUSE TO STATEHOUSE



STATE LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

RE:LEARNING 1988-1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. F. Walker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

EA 028888

ECS
EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

2

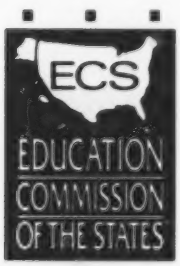
FROM SCHOOLHOUSE TO STATEHOUSE:

RE:LEARNING 1988-1995

STATE LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

August 1997

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3457
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
http:/www.ecs.org



Copies of this book are available for $9.50 plus postage and handling from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427, 303-299-3692. Ask for No. SI-97-10. ECS accepts prepaid orders, MasterCard and Visa. All sales are final.

ECS is pleased to have other organizations or individuals share its materials with their constituents. To request permission to excerpt part of this publication either in print or technologically, please write or fax Josie Canales, Education Commission of the States, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; fax 303-296-8332.

© Copyright 1997 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education. The ECS office is located in Denver, Colorado.

It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Postage and handling charges if your order totals: Up to $10.00, **$3.00**; $10.01-$25.00, **$4.25**; $25.01-$50.00, **$5.75**; $50.01-$75.00, **$8.50**; $75.01-$100.00, **$10.00**; over $100.00, **$12.00**

Generous discounts are available for bulk orders of single publications. They are: 10-24 copies, 10% discount; 25-49 copies, 20% discount; and 50+ copies, 30% discount.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary *1*

Foreword *3*

Chapter 1: A New Kind of Partnership *5*

Chapter 2: Forces Working For and Against Success *9*

Chapter 3: Re:Learning's Impact on Schools and Students *18*

Chapter 4: Re:Learning's Impact on Policy and Policymaking *24*

Chapter 5: Some Closing Thoughts *29*

Sources and Acknowledgments *32*

Bibliography *34*

Executive Summary

In 1988, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and Coalition of Essential Schools (the Coalition) joined forces to create Re:Learning, a unique experiment in reform aimed at changing the education system "from schoolhouse to statehouse" to bring about improved learning for all students.

The Coalition agreed to help schools redesign their teaching and learning strategies, based on nine "common principles." ECS agreed to help state and district leaders work together to rethink and redesign administrative structures, regulations and other major features of the education system in or der to create a climate more hospitable to school-level innovation and improvement.

As this partnership drew to a close in late 1995, the two organizations set out to review what had been accomplished and what had been learned as a result of their work together. Particular attention was given to examining the influence and impact of Re:Learning on both student achievement and on policymaking in the participating states, and to identifying the various forces working for and against the success of the initiative at the state, district and school levels.

Re:Learning encountered formidable obstacles at both the state and local levels: a disjointed policy environment, unstable funding, turnover in political leadership, a lack of understanding and support from important constituencies, the sheer complexity of the work itself and the difficulty of getting diverse groups to work together effectively.

Nonetheless, Re:Learning demonstrated remarkable staying power, managing not only to survive in the face of such barriers and obstacles, but also to emerge as a powerful force for change and improvement. For example:

- The number of schools exploring and implementing the principles on which Re:Learning is based increased dramatically over the seven years — from 56 schools in 1988 to 935 schools nationwide in 1995. Of that number, more than 500 were located in the 12 states that formally joined Re:Learning.
- Schools' efforts to operationalize the Re:Learning principles resulted in a variety of innovations and improvements, including higher expectations for students, in-depth interdisciplinary studies, block

scheduling, heterogeneous grouping, shared decisionmaking, and more rigorous and regular professional development for teachers and administrators.

- Teachers and principals cited a variety of improvements that they attributed to their efforts to implement Re:Learning: lower absenteeism, higher graduation rates, fewer disciplinary problems, more students going on to higher education, and increased creativity, thoughtfulness and initiative on the part of both students and staff.
- A review of the research showed that schools that redesigned curriculum, pedagogy and organizational structures around the kind of teaching and learning principles embodied in Re:Learning showed measurable improvement in student learning, including higher test scores.
- Re:Learning spawned significant new structures, activities and relationships: professional development networks, school district/higher education partnerships and statewide leadership groups that evolved from the original Re:Learning cadres and steering committees. It provided schools and districts with greater formal and informal access to the policymaking process, and sharpened state leaders' thinking not only about how to redesign policy but also about how to put together the political coalitions and infrastructure of support needed to promote school-based innovation and restructuring.
- Participating states captured, in the form of policy, key ideas from the Re:Learning principles: new approaches to teacher education and professional development; greater flexibility for restructuring schools in terms of curriculum design and instructional and assessment practices; increased state-level support for school change in the form of funds, feedback, resource people; and avenues of communication for sharing ideas, problems and concerns.

Over the seven-year period of the formal partnership, Re:Learning both contributed to profound changes in the world of schooling, and benefited from them. Today, there is significantly greater willingness on the part of state policy leaders to take a systemic approach to education reform. There is greater public and political support for opening up the system to innovation and diversification. There is lively and growing interest in the increased number of approaches aimed at elementary, middle and high school improvement.

In this new environment, the ideas of Re:Learning are in many ways even more compelling — and far less radical — than they were during the life of the partnership. The lessons learned in Re:Learning schools and states should prove of great value to educators and policymakers as they struggle with the challenges of the next stage of reform.

Foreword

From its beginning in 1988, Re:Learning touched thousands of people, from schoolchildren to governors, and permanently influenced the ways and means of school practice and school governance across the country. The work was not always easy. The project's life corresponded with as volatile a seven-year period in state politics as we have had during this entire century. The system of schooling is so complex and interconnected that individual schools trying to reshape themselves are pressured from many directions to return to old ways. Despite this, change does come, and in moving that change along, we have learned some hard lessons that have caused us to alter how we operate.

We learned that persistence counts, that common sense and proven methods in public education are persuasive across a broad political spectrum. Ideas for reshaping the system do spread among policymakers and take root. More and more states — and districts — are trying to reduce bureaucracy, eliminate regulations and shift decisionmaking to schools — ideas that when we first proposed them seemed radical. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) continues to encourage states to develop policy that dismantles the regulatory barriers; the Coalition of Essential Schools (the Coalition) helps schools use their tenuous new-found freedoms to demonstrate higher student achievement for all young people.

We learned that schools do not change because their leaders accept an argument for a certain kind of reform. It takes hard, slogging work by committed teachers and administrators over a substantial period of time, anticipating resistance with a strategy to meet it head-on, and acknowledging that change carries with it some serious costs. The Coalition can now share solid examples of success over time; ECS helps state leaders understand and use those examples as policy options are considered.

We learned that both state policy and school groups need stimulation, even provocation, from outsiders to push ahead, and that the concept of "critical friend" makes sense up and down the educational hierarchy. We learned, as well, that we all must embrace the difficult art of consulting with the public as the price of its support for change.

Building on what we have learned, both organizations have made broader ownership of the ideas behind Re:Learning a priority. For

instance, the ECS State Leadership for Learning project requires a state's ECS commissioners to design a policy environment that embraces diverse school designs with a track record of success. And the Coalition's unprecedented creation of a National Congress as its primary governance structure turns ownership of the effort over to member schools and centers.

Looking back to 1988, we see how much public education has and has not changed. The basic structures are still there, and schools keep in familiar ways. State policymakers still express skepticism that schools can change; school and community members remain skeptical that policy changes will endure long enough to warrant change. Yet there is a level of interest and controversy found in state offices and among the most vital schools that is unprecedented over the last 30 years. The platform for reform, the very expectation of serious reform, has been laid.

We believe we made a difference for children, one that will stand the test of time. It has been our privilege to lead the Re:Learning project.

Frank Newman

Theodore R. Sizer

Frank Newman
President
Education Commission of the States

Theodore R. Sizer
Chairman
Coalition of Essential Schools

Chapter 1: A New Kind of Partnership

An Unusual Partnership Linked Schools and State Leaders

In 1988, through the generosity of anonymous funders, two organizations formed a unique partnership called Re:Learning. The Coalition of Essential Schools (the Coalition) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) joined to implement a radically different approach for the time. Working with a steadily increasing number of states and schools, they altered the education system — from the schoolhouse to the statehouse — to bring about improved learning for all students.

The Coalition, based at Brown University, began in 1984 with 10 schools led by principals who shared a vision of a reforming high school. By 1988, 56 schools were at various stages of exploring, planning and implementing school change based on the nine common principles Chairman Theodore R. Sizer put forth in his 1984 book *Horace's Compromise* (see box on page 8). Many observers were intrigued by the Coalition's work and hoped it would rejuvenate secondary school education in this country. The work, however, was difficult and the rate of expansion slow. In addition, without a hospitable environment at the district and state levels, it was thought many schools would be afraid to try, and those that did might squander time and energy gaining permission to reinvent themselves.

Since 1965, ECS, based in Denver, had been working with state leaders to develop education policy and leadership. ECS saw that the first wave of reform after publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 had been piecemeal, top-down and largely ineffectual. It was eager to help state leaders rethink education policy from the perspective of school change and in a systemic way.

By coupling their different skills and perspectives, these two organizations brought the reality of school-based change into the world of education policy in an effort to foster school improvement in hundreds of schools in a dozen states.

Everyone Had a Job to Do

Within the context of Re:Learning, the Coalition agreed to help schools redesign their teaching and learning strategies — and the organizational structures that support them — in keeping with the nine common principles. ECS agreed to help state and district leaders support a network of restructuring schools by creating a hospitable policy environment and providing necessary resources.

States were expected to provide funds and other support for schools exploring the Coalition principles, create conditions that would permit schools to make changes necessary to implement the principles, and identify and remove state policy and regulatory barriers.

Specific strategies for both schools and states were proposed, based on the experiences of the two partners, and further evolved over the course of the initiative. There was to be a coordinator for the schools within a state, a cadre of school-, district- and state-level educators and other appropriate partners, and a leadership team made up of the governor, chief state school officer and other senior elected and appointed officials.

All parties were expected to make a five-year commitment to carrying out their part of the agreement.

A Dozen States, Hundreds of Schools and Thousands of Educators Took Part

The first states to join Re:Learning in 1988 were Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico and Rhode Island; Pennsylvania followed in 1989. Colorado, Indiana and Maine joined in 1991, South Carolina in 1992, Missouri in 1993, and Florida in late 1994, to bring the total to 12.

Within these states, the number of schools exploring, planning and implementing the nine common principles added significantly to the total number of schools formally associated with the Coalition — "Essential Schools." For example, by the end of 1989, the number of Essential Schools had reached 99, with 50 of them in the first six Re:Learning states. Three years later, there were 431 schools active; 310 were located in nine Re:Learning states. By October 1995, the total was up to 931 schools, with 519 in the 12 Re:Learning states.
Over the years, Re:Learning also provided information and opportunities

to exchange ideas related to the nine common principles with increasingly large numbers of interested educators and members of the public. For example, participation in the Coalition's annual Fall Forum became an important component of Re:Learning. One of the defining structures of the Coalition, the Fall Forum brings together like-minded teachers and administrators to share their experiences with Essential School reform through workshops and roundtable discussions. Registration grew from 500 participants in 1988 to 4,000 in 1995.

Similarly, circulation of *Horace*, the Coalition's professional journal, grew dramatically. Each issue of *Horace* addresses a topic related to reform in Coalition schools and shows how it plays out in schools across the country. Circulation increased from 1,400 complimentary subscriptions in 1989-90 to 5,500 paid subscriptions in 1994-95.

This growth was a remarkable achievement. For all its strength, however, Re:Learning faced powerful obstacles, and the work at both the school and state levels proved more complicated and frustrating than anyone imagined.

The Nine Common Principles

1. The schools should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily be "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the goals of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of the teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation-an "Exhibition." This exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you, but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per-pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10%. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

-Coalition of Essential Schools

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Re:Learning had a strong grassroots, bottom-up component that seemed more likely to succeed than the old top-down approaches.

Chapter 2: Forces Working For and Against Success

The Times Called for a New Approach

Re:Learning arrived on the scene when both states and schools were looking for help in responding to criticism that the education establishment was failing the nation's youth. State and school leaders, responding to published reports and past failures, were searching for a model or framework for reforming the education system, particularly the much-maligned high school. A number of governors were active in ECS' work to improve the education system through policy.

A former New Mexico state department of education official reconstructed this chronology: "The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 led to prescriptive legislation. Teachers closed their doors and resisted. When *Horace's Compromise* appeared, it rang a bell, and with a new governor who was also chairman of ECS, everything came together. Re:Learning seemed the answer and we embraced it with great zeal."

A participant in Pennsylvania put it this way: "Remember, in 1988, it was five years after *A Nation At Risk*. There was a feeling of openness to change at the school level. . . and a lot of these state-imposed initiatives hadn't yielded fruit. . . . [State leaders] were looking for an initiative to grab hold of and that the governor could be identified with. Re:Learning's schoolhouse-to-statehouse concept was attractive because it allowed for empowering schools to bring about and cultivate change at the grassroots."

The Ideas Made Sense

Furthermore, the schoolhouse-to-statehouse idea made sense. Because the Coalition focused on the school, empowering teachers and administrators to reinvent their schools in ways that worked for their students and community, Re:Learning had a strong grassroots, bottom-up component that seemed more likely to succeed than the old top-down approaches. Yet the effort also acknowledged the broader political and

bureaucratic context within which school change must take place; ECS' expertise in working with these constituencies was seen as a real plus. The systemic approach to school reform was powerful and persuasive.

A school board member from Pennsylvania saw the issue in its simplest terms: "Change within schools must come from the school community, but you need a hospitable state framework for it to flourish." A Missouri principal recalled, "[Re:Learning] was pretty inviting. It appealed to people's sense of wanting to work together to improve schools. There was interest in a framework that created the opportunity for collaboration. . . , a sense of partnership."

Within schools, the nine common principles and the process of exploring the ideas and implications was a breath of fresh air. One Delaware principal remembered hearing other principals discussing Re:Learning in 1988 and carrying the ideas around in his head for a year until he was in a school where he could begin working on them with his staff.

Teachers from Arkansas and New Mexico saw Re:Learning as providing teachers with their first opportunity to have input on reform, to be treated as professionals whose voices carried weight, and to learn, as a teacher put it, "if we all work together, how much better things can be."

The principal of an alternative school in Philadelphia saw Re:Learning as a way to reach out beyond the district and connect with like-minded educators elsewhere in the state and the nation.

But Not Everyone Bought In

The strength of the Re:Learning ideas and approach was so self-evident to its supporters that they underestimated the resistance they would encounter in some quarters. Some opponents, within both individual schools and the state bureaucracy, bided their time, confident this idea too would pass.

In a five-year study of eight of the first 12 Essential Schools, researchers D.E. Muncy and P.J. McQuillan concluded that while it was easy to get a small group within a school to work on restructuring, it was much more difficult to get the whole staff to develop a shared vision and move together toward realizing it. Other studies echoed the fact that getting

and keeping everyone on board was both difficult and critical to success.

In New Mexico, "Not everyone at the state department was of a single mind. A lot of folks were really used to being the enforcer and were reluctant to give that up." In Arkansas, Re:Learning was "tolerated" because "this was something the governor wanted." Some critics, however, felt the state law simply did not permit any diminution of the department's regulatory role. The state department of education at that time was "heavily oriented to regulation . . . , and Re:Learning people were viewed as people with pie-in-the-sky dreams." When the governor left, "that put us back to square one."

In Delaware, one participant observed, "I don't think upper-level state administrators were serious about changing. Policymakers didn't really understand how state policy shaped what happened." Another person said, "People in policy positions were quite satisfied with the status quo. They had no intention or desire to change."

In some places, supporters confronted outright hostility. In Arkansas and Colorado, for example, vocal opposition made adherents cautious. The experience of being targeted by special-interest groups scared policymakers and administrators and heightened their sensitivity to words and concepts that raised "red flags" with groups monitoring school reform initiatives. On the positive side, these experiences were a vivid reminder of the importance of involving the public, keeping people informed of what was happening in the schools, and being able to react more quickly to opposition when it arose.

Not Everyone Was Brought In

In hindsight, many involved in Re:Learning believed they did not adequately involve all of the people who should be involved. A New Mexico participant observed that the concept of "schoolhouse" was interpreted to mean "the school itself, rather than the school community — parents, school board and so on." In Pennsylvania, "in some districts, the teachers and the principal went off without involving anyone else." A Missouri principal highlighted the importance of involving parents in particular, and how overlooking them "caused problems almost everywhere Re:Learning is." Studies of Coalition schools have reinforced the importance of substantive parental involvement, particularly early in the process.

It is also clear in retrospect that districts were not involved to the extent they needed to be if Re:Learning was really to be a systemic approach involving more than just the "schoolhouse" on one side and the "statehouse" on the other. A Missouri participant noted, "The buy-in of districts was overlooked. If you really want to embed changes, you've got to woo districts in ways that haven't really been worked on." A school board member from Pennsylvania observed, "There was some formal support by the state school board association, but there was really no concentrated effort to involve school boards." This same participant observed there were not a lot of risk-takers at the district level; they needed encouragement from the state.

The complexity of involving many different constituencies across the state that were not used to working together was not fully appreciated.

Re:Learning participants in several states also thought they failed to adequately involve their legislatures. A Pennsylvania participant stated flatly, "The legislative branch of government was left out of the conversation." In Illinois, "We needed to build commitment through a collective stance, i.e., partnerships with legislative staff and legislative committees, as way of informing people instead of trying to work directly with the policymakers such as the governor, the state superintendent, the state board, etc." In Colorado, it was difficult to work statewide because local control is powerful and "the legislature is difficult to manage." What that means, one participant observed, is that "it takes three to five years to influence educational policy in the legislative arena," but it can be done.

Some Did Not Understand What They Were Getting Into

The complexity of involving many different constituencies across the state that were not used to working together was not fully appreciated. In Pennsylvania, for example, "The whole notion of the schoolhouse informing the policy changes wasn't understood . . . . People in the schools don't really understand the importance of working to influence policy. They're focused on changing teaching and learning in their schools, and state policy isn't a priority." Another Pennsylvania participant added, "In the governor's office, there wasn't a real understanding of Re:Learning's potential to serve as an umbrella for systemic reform. They wanted something to grab on to, but they didn't really understand it." In Illinois, participants cited "a lack of commitment and understanding by the key policymakers — the governor's office, the state board, the state superintendent."

In most states the commitment not just to Re:Learning, but to reform in general, proved particularly vunerable to turnover in leadership.

A principal from Delaware observed that the state-level people "were well-intentioned . . . but looking back . . . the foundation really wasn't there. I don't think the governor really understood . . . . We didn't understand the implications of shifting responsibility and authority within schools, at the district level and at the state level — and the friction or opposition that would be generated at each level." Complicating things even more, "problems and snags came up one at a time, and we had no road map to tell us what to expect." Another principal agreed: "Yes, there was enthusiasm for it, but without a lot of thought given to the policies that would be needed to implement it."

Across the states, many agreed they did not foresee how hard the work would be at both the school and policy levels. Especially for high schools, implementing the nine common principles involves fundamentally different approaches to teaching, learning and organizing a school. And it takes at least five years of concerted effort before substantial accomplishments begin to show. Teachers and principals cited burnout as a problem. One observed, "We just don't have the time because of the way school is structured." Another agreed: "That's part of losing our naiveté. We're finding that we've put hours and hours into it and we still aren't done."

Changes in Leadership Could Be Crippling

When Re:Learning began in 1988, a five-year commitment from states seemed long-term; it bridged political cycles and went beyond the life span and scope of a typical school-change initiative. In most states, however, the commitment not just to Re:Learning, but to reform in general, proved particularly vulnerable to turnover in leadership.

In most of the participating states, Re:Learning was strongly identified as someone's special project — the governor, the commissioner of education, the private foundation that was funding it. In nearly every case, when one or more of those sponsors left office — as happened in Maine, Delaware and Illinois, among others — it proved almost impossible to sustain statewide commitment to the initiative. In several states, Re:Learning remained an isolated special project for which responsibility was delegated to one staff member or another, rather than being shared by a coalition of political and policy leaders.

The original Re:Learning strategy called for two groups — a cadre and a steering committee, working in tandem — to assume primary responsibility for leadership. The cadre — envisioned as a sort of think tank made up of teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, university faculty, state department of education senior staff, community and business leaders — was to focus on: (1) determining the administrative and policy actions needed to sustain and nurture the work of Coalition schools, and (2) developing a clearer vision of what a redesigned education system should look like. The steering committee, which would include the governor, the chief state school officer, the state board chairman, legislative leaders and other key policymakers, was to provide credibility and clout, and focus on building political and public support for cadre recommendations and ideas.

Only in New Mexico did the cadre/steering committee structure evolve as originally envisioned. There, the cadre came to be regarded as perhaps the only entity in the state with a clear, coherent vision for reshaping the education system. The steering committee supported the cadre's work by providing visibility and leadership for Re:Learning at both the state and local levels. The New Mexico Re:Learning initiative was viewed as a key element of the state's reform strategy, with broad ownership and support.

The more typical pattern in Re:Learning states was a viable cadre whose influence was blunted by a weak — or, in some cases, nonexistent — steering committee. In most states, neither the cadre nor the steering committee managed to put down roots, and they were either disbanded or absorbed into other entities.

"The steering committee never really turned into an effective leadership team," said a state board of education member in one Re:Learning state. "It wasn't clear what its role would be, [and] there was no communications link to the business community and other constituent groups." As researcher Robert Hampel observed in a 1993 report on the Delaware Re:Learning initiative, establishing a strong, stable core of leadership for reform, "while it looked logical on paper, and honored all the fashionable rhetoric about systemic change, turned out to be much harder and messier than anyone foresaw."

Another problem was a lack of clarity about the role of state coordinators, who had responsibility for providing support and assistance to participating schools as well as working with the cadres and steering committees. Often, the people chosen to serve as coordinators were state education department staff members who found it difficult to provide adequate attention to both roles. To the extent they were able to carve out an active role working with schools, state coordinators played a vital role in moving Re:Learning forward. But their effectiveness was severely limited, in many cases, by lack of resources and support and by the inherent constraints of the bureaucratic system in which they were trying to carry out their dual role.

Waivers Were Not the Answer

As originally envisioned, Re:Learning's "statehouse" piece would be built on requests from schools to the state board of education for waivers of existing rules and regulations. Cadres were to monitor these requests and use them as a guide to identifying state and district policies that interfered with school restructuring.

The waiver process worked relatively well in Pennsylvania. There, the waivers Re:Learning schools had asked for and obtained had a significant influence on a package of policy revisions put forth by the state board of education in 1993 as part of its ongoing review of curriculum and student assessment regulations. The revised regulations, which Pennsylvania Re:Learning leaders actively supported and lobbied for, provided substantially greater flexibility for school districts, and both allowed and encouraged them to integrate curriculum, restructure the school day, diversify testing methods and expand learning options for students.

In the majority of states, however, the shortcomings of the waiver strategy became more and more apparent. For example, when state-required credit hours prevented Coalition schools from establishing graduation requirements based on mastery rather than seat time, waivers offered insufficient protection, since they could be pulled later by the granting body or superseded by new legislation. Furthermore, the use of waivers, by taking the heat off the system, could actually retard progress in the longer term.

Also, the changes needed were not easily formulated as requests for waivers. Hampel, reporting on the Delaware experience, observed:

To our surprise, there were few requests for waivers. Although a few individual teachers privately voiced support for far-reaching recommendations (abolishing tenure was the most common), the schools did not boldly challenge the larger system — and in some schools, the knowledge of the larger system was too incomplete to make a well-informed and persuasive critique. Moreover, the proposals submitted asked for such modest exemptions (e.g., asking the state to pay for teachers' inservice-day lunches) that we feared they trivialized the original bold spirit of the waiver provision. The discussion of roadblocks rarely identified state laws or regulations. More often, they pointed to the district, the school boards, parents, the central office, which in hindsight we realized had been underestimated as potential allies and adversaries.

Existing measures and data sometimes did not show the benefits that supporters at both the school and state levels knew were taking place.

It Was Hard to Demonstrate Success

Existing measures and data sometimes did not show the benefits that supporters at both the school and state levels knew were taking place. One Delaware principal asserted, "We got to a point where we knew kids were using their minds better, writing better, etc. . . , but we didn't quantify it enough and we didn't know how to demonstrate 'Here's why our school is better.' We couldn't articulate the benefits, and as a result we didn't have people jumping on the bandwagon."

A Missouri principal suggested: "In a way, the heart of the problem is a 'fuzziness.' It's not about higher test scores. We're after a different kind of interaction with kids, and with kids and their own learning. We should have looked for the kinds of tests that helped us do that." In Delaware, two participating principals said their districts now concentrate on performance indicators, such as attendance, discipline, even test scores: "We've learned to use school performance data to show gains."

Only recently have researchers begun to define in operational terms what the hoped-for changes look like in Coalition and similarly reforming schools and what impact they can have. But the most relevant studies on the effect of these reforms on student learning were not available to schools and states in the middle of the Re:Learning experience, making it harder for them to make their case.

Funding Was Often a Problem

There were several kinds of problems associated with funding — where the money came from, who controlled it, how much there was and

Re:Learning had real impact on schools and students and helped change the policy environment in which schools operate.

whether it continued year after year. For example, in Arkansas, there never was state funding, only private funds administered by the state, and Re:Learning itself was absorbed into a larger reform initiative. In Delaware, a set amount was given to participating schools, but that amount declined over time and the state was not able to bring on new schools while continuing to support the original ones. Also, according to one principal, "the schools involved felt special, but it created a backlash and caused resentment among schools that weren't funded."

In Pennsylvania, no state appropriation was made or requested. Other funding sources were tapped, but "as more and more schools became involved, resources didn't expand, and people and money were stretched too thin. With work this difficult, sustained support for the people in schools is necessary." On the other hand, while grants were important, particularly for the exploring stage, "we need to be careful that people don't get too dependent on grant money," one official said. Both states and districts need to make a financial commitment, and states should not just be using federal pass-through money.

Only in New Mexico did state funding continue at a healthy level. But New Mexico Re:Learning encompassed pre-kindergarten through post-secondary, which would strain the most munificent resources. So while the actual dollar amount allocated for Re:Learning increased, the individual share for schools decreased.

It is easy to conclude that the forces working against Re:Learning far outweighed those working for its success. Nonetheless, Re:Learning had real impact on schools and students and helped change the policy environment in which schools operate.

Chapter 3: Re:Learning's Impact on Schools and Students

Schools Used the Nine Common Principles to Redesign Themselves

The key questions for an education reform initiative are: what difference will it make? Will it change schooling? Will it improve student learning? Re:Learning schools attacked the question head on through an in-depth course of self-study.

Teachers and administrators met regularly to discuss the nine common principles, to explore how they might be used to improve teaching and learning, and to plan the changes needed to make improvements. They worked to develop a consensus between staff and community and then implemented agreed-upon changes. The principles focused them on making their education program more rigorous, requiring all students to engage in active, in-depth learning and be able to demonstrate the quality and breadth of that learning. The principles pushed teachers to forge a more personalized relationship with students and to self-consciously promote a tone of decency and respect throughout the school. The whole was driven by a vision of improved learning for all students.

The schools differed in how they conceived of and implemented the changes, just as they differed in size, location, socioeconomic and ethnic makeup, history and tradition. Re:Learning schools represented the full range of possibility — public and private, traditional and alternative, large (up to 2,000 students) and small (fewer than 200 students), from predominantly minority to predominantly white, in urban, suburban and rural settings.

Practitioners Reported a Variety of Changes and Improvements

Though each school operationalized the principles in its own way, teachers and principals reported the following changes most often:

In Re:Learning schools, teacher-student interaction was refocused on the student.

- Many Re:Learning schools re-examined and changed their curriculum along interdisciplinary lines. As opposed to organizing staff and courses by discipline, teams of teachers developed units of study around "Essential Questions" that emphasized depth of understanding over coverage of material. The resulting curriculum was more focused, rigorous, engaging and equitable.
- Many Re:Learning schools reorganized their schedule to accommodate in-depth interdisciplinary courses, time for student advisories, experiential learning activities and more time for teachers to plan and work together. Schools shifted from the traditional 45- to 50-minute classes to longer blocks of time as a means of promoting intellectual rigor and greater personal contact between teachers and students.
- In Re:Learning schools, teacher-student interaction was refocused on the student. Teachers no longer relied primarily on the lecture format, but instead used coaching, cooperative learning and other active-learning approaches to maximize student engagement.
- Re:Learning schools focused on strengthening the bond between students and teachers and increasing the points of contact. "Advisories" coupled a teacher with a group of students to provide intensive coaching, as well as encouragement and support. Students were grouped in "families" or "houses," and teacher teams moved with students from one grade to the next. Teachers worked with smaller numbers of students and got to know them and their needs well.
- In many schools, tracking was reduced or eliminated. Teachers worked in teams of two to five with a core of heterogeneously grouped students. Advisories were made up of students with different abilities, interests and ages.
- Re:Learning schools designed new ways of assessing student progress and performance. The assessment mix might include portfolios and exhibitions as well as conventional testing. Some schools included a culminating exhibition of knowledge and understanding as a graduation requirement.
- In many Re:Learning schools, decisions about school management, curriculum, teacher assignment, assessment, hiring and budgeting were made by teams that included faculty, administrators, parents and community representatives.
- In many Re:Learning schools, traditional "inservice" days were replaced with in-depth, team-based sessions focused on updating and upgrading instructional practices, curriculum design and assessment. Other sessions focused on peer relations and emphasized giving and

receiving feedback, team building and conflict resolution. Some Re:Learning schools developed intensive orientation programs and ongoing mentoring for new teachers. Funding from various state and federal sources was consolidated to provide a more coherent professional development program.

After going through this process of exploring, planning and implementing changes based on the nine common principles, teachers and principals from Re:Learning schools cited a variety of improvements in school life and student achievement. Many pointed to indicators such as lower absenteeism, higher graduation rates, fewer disciplinary problems, more students going on to higher education, and increased creativity, thoughtfulness and initiative on the part of both students and staff. Some schools showed improvements in test scores and other measures of student achievement as well.

Teachers and principals from Re:Learning schools cited a variety of improvements in school life and student achievement: lower absenteeism, higher graduation rates, fewer disciplinary problems, more students going on to higher education, and increased creativity, thoughtfulness and initiative on the part of both students and staff.

Research Shows Such Changes Improve Student Learning

Adding weight to anecdotal reports are a number of studies that show student learning improves when schools implement changes such as those embodied in the Coalition's nine common principles. Researcher Margaret M. MacMullen analyzed nearly 150 studies of Coalition schools and concluded that implementing the nine common principles leads to positive impact on students, that schools are able to implement those principles, and that the changes involved are more difficult than teachers and principals first imagine.

Not all the restructuring schools studied were Coalition schools, and the Coalition schools that were included were not all located in Re:Learning states. Absent a comprehensive study of student achievement solely in Coalition schools in Re:Learning states, the research MacMullen reviewed provides the best available evidence of the likely impact on students where Re:Learning was well and fully implemented in schools.

In particular, MacMullen found that when school reform focuses on intellectual development and creating a sense of community, as the Coalition's nine common principles do, school changes have a positive impact on student learning.

Reforms With an Intellectual Focus Improve Student Learning

Just as the Re:Learning partnership drew to a close, the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) at the University of Wisconsin published a summary report of a comprehensive five-year research effort that studied in depth the impact of having an intellectual focus in school reform. Researchers F.M. Newmann and G.G. Wehlage developed definitions of "authentic academic achievement" and "authentic pedagogy" which they then measured in a variety of school settings. Their definitions embodied the focus on intellectual development in the common principles which emphasize "thorough student mastery and achievement rather than . . . an effort to merely cover content," the need to "provoke students to learn how to learn and thus teach themselves" and "the students' demonstration that they can do important things."

In another study, CORS researchers studied 24 restructuring elementary, middle and high schools in 16 states and 22 districts. Nine of the schools were Coalition schools. In all, nearly 140 teachers and more than 3,000 students took part. Researchers conducted site visits, classroom observations, interviews and surveys and scored more than 3,000 pieces of student work. Their focus was on the effect of school changes on student performance, especially the depth and quality of the students' work. They also developed standards for instruction and assessment so they could assess pedagogy as well as performance. The authors of the study concluded:

> We offer new evidence . . . that authentic pedagogy pays off in improved student performance and can improve student performance regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The results were consistent across different grades and subjects in schools across the United States. Until now, arguments in support of "authentic" teaching have often been made on philosophical grounds. We believe this study offers some of the strongest empirical justification to date for pursuing such a course. (Newmann, Marks and Gamoran, 1995)

Companion studies by CORS and work by other researchers lend support to this powerful endorsement. A 1995 CORS study, by V.E. Lee and others, found comparable impacts using conventional test measures in math and science to track more than 9,000 students from grades 8 to 12. Researchers at Columbia University's National Center for Restructuring Education, including Linda Darling-Hammond, used a case-study

approach to examine authentic assessment in five Coalition schools and found positive effects on student accomplishments.

A Strong Sense of School Community Also Improves Student Learning

University of Chicago researchers A.S. Bryk and M.E. Driscoll developed a definition of a "communally organized" school that included a committed and caring teaching staff who hold high expectations — both intellectual and social — for all students and who share in school decisionmaking. Like Coalition schools, these schools are often smaller, with closer contact between teachers and students and a common curriculum for all. In contrast, more traditional or bureaucratically organized schools tend to be larger and more departmentalized, with a wide variety of courses that students choose from. Bryk and Driscoll found that schools organized along a more communal structure showed improved student performance and involvement in schools.

Other CORS studies, including the 1995 one by Lee and others, also found schools that had restructured in ways that emphasized community over traditional school bureaucracy showed substantially higher achievement for all students throughout the high school years.

The importance of school as community is also borne out in research being carried out by R.D. Felner and associates at the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois. Their multi-year study showed the positive impact on student performance of implementing the Carnegie Council's recommendations for middle schools. Four of the eight recommendations match both the definition of communal structure used in other research and Coalition principles that focus on community. For example, they emphasize success for all students, a core curriculum, a small learning community and school-based decisionmaking.

But the Changes Needed Are Difficult To Implement

Unfortunately, the kind of changes needed to bring about improved student performance are complex and difficult to consistently implement throughout a school. Newmann and Wehlage, for example, found that even in the most successful classrooms, the level of instruction was well below the ideal for "authentic pedagogy." Similarly, for teachers to take collective responsibility for student learning requires that they believe all students can learn. Several studies, however, reported many teachers

While the potential gains for students within Re:Learning states were great, the participating schools had their work cut out for them.

believe student achievement is determined by forces they cannot change, such as inherited abilities and home and neighborhood environment.

Other studies mentioned the difficulty of achieving and maintaining changes in pedagogy such as high-quality assessments, effective coaching, demanding group work and high academic standards. Studies also showed true collaboration among teachers — while central to a strong professional community — is difficult and relatively rare. The level of collaboration required calls for teachers to reflect critically on their own teaching, give and receive feedback, assess other data from students and parents, and constructively manage disagreements among themselves.

It is clear then that while the potential gains for students within Re:Learning states were great, the participating schools had their work cut out for them. They were not working alone, however. A basic tenet of Re:Learning was that systemic change — from schoolhouse to statehouse — as well as financial and policy support were needed to foster the kind of change embedded in the nine common principles.

Chapter 4: Re:Learning's Impact on Policy and Policymaking

Interest Was Not the Same As Readiness for Change

In joining Re:Learning, state leaders made a commitment not just to support the work of individual Coalition schools, but also to simultaneously create a policy environment that would allow and encourage all schools to undertake the kinds of changes that Coalition schools were pursuing. Policy leaders in Re:Learning states were expected to work together to rethink and redesign administrative structures, regulations and other major features of the education system to create a climate more hospitable to school-level innovation and change.

Looking back, it is clear the states that joined Re:Learning were in varying stages of readiness to engage in comprehensive reform along these lines. While most of the states expressed strong interest in systemic change, few had leadership willing or able to capitalize on Re:Learning's potential to serve as a catalyst for comprehensive change and improvement.

Clearly, several states, notably New Mexico and Missouri, used Re:Learning to strengthen and help focus their systemic reform efforts. Others, however, proved less capable of mustering the commitment to move ahead in a focused way.

As a Re:Learning leader in Pennsylvania described it: "Too many people thought of Re:Learning as a project rather than as a new way of doing business. It could have been the initiative that pulled everything together into a comprehensive reform strategy, but if anyone at the state level thought of it that way, it was never communicated. One had to be very close to the various programs and initiatives to understand how they were connected. As a result, no clear compelling vision was ever brought forth to the general public, and that made real reform very difficult."

Re:Learning influenced school reform efforts by providing highly visible models of what schools can and should be.

In many states, there proved to be a troubling lack of connectedness between the "schoolhouse" and the "statehouse." As a Maine Re:Learning leader described it: "There aren't enough people who live in the school domain who know how to talk to the policy domain. There hasn't been the commitment at either the state level or the school level to weaving together policy change at both levels."

Re:Learning Influenced State Policy

Despite such obstacles, Re:Learning had a substantial impact on policy and policymaking in several states, where Re:Learning participants played an active role in the development of major elements of state reform initiatives, including the following:

- In Arkansas, the design and implementation of Act 236, a comprehensive reform package that established statewide learning standards for K-12 students, development of curriculum and assessments tied to the new standards, a performance-based teacher licensing system and greater school flexibility in such areas as professional development and program design. In New Mexico, a new outcomes-based accreditation model that gives more flexibility to restructuring schools, competency frameworks that emphasize active student learning and revisions in the statewide student testing program, including a new portfolio requirement for grades 4 and 6.
- In Indiana, the incorporation of portfolios and writing samples into the statewide assessment program, modifications in the new performance-based accreditation program to accommodate restructuring schools, and revisions in state board policy that allow professional development to be considered, in certain cases, as part of required student contact time.
- In Missouri, the decentralization and deregulation of teacher professional development, and the creation of a system of regional centers to provide assistance and support for restructuring schools and school networks.

Another way in which Re:Learning has influenced school reform efforts is by providing highly visible models of what schools can and should be. In several states, Re:Learning schools served as the primary testing ground for new statewide reform initiatives and strategies in such areas as school-based professional development, curriculum design and the development of new methods of assessing student learning.

In Delaware, for example, the majority of schools selected in 1993 and 1994 as development sites for New Directions and Project 21, the state's primary reform initiatives, were Re:Learning schools. Similarly, in Indiana, half of the schools funded for Indiana 2000, which provided funding and policy incentives to support school-based innovation, were Re:Learning schools.

Even States That Did Not Join Were Influenced

Several states, including Massachusetts, Michigan and Ohio, seriously explored becoming part of Re:Learning and then for one reason or another backed away. In three of the most heavily populated states — California, New York and Texas — large urban areas developed close ties to the Coalition without the state as a whole becoming part of Re:Learning. In New York and California, in particular, given their size and diversity, it was clear that a regional approach made more sense, though statewide initiatives also supported Coalition schools and fostered similar efforts.

In New York, for example, when the state compact for learning was inaugurated, 17 Coalition schools were asked to act as the vanguard for the initiative. A number of factors accounted for this: a high concentration of Essential Schools around New York City, a sympathetic state education commissioner, a supportive Board of Regents, and the active involvement of university faculty and school administrators. Discretion for educational programming reverted to the school level, and the schools were granted sweeping waivers from state requirements.

In California, people associated with the Coalition and ECS were actively involved in shaping legislation and subsequent support for professional development and innovation in the schools, as well as development of a statewide education plan.

In all of these cases, though the states were not formally affiliated with Re:Learning, large numbers of schools became actively involved with the Coalition, and state and district personnel tried to engage in systemic reform of the type associated with Re:Learning. It is impossible to trace the influence of Re:Learning on these efforts, but participants were welcomed into conversations about Re:Learning and took back to their local efforts a rich variety of ideas and lessons learned.

A major strength of Re:Learning was its ability to bring people together across various levels of the system within states — and across states — to share ideas, problems and results.

Linking Like-Minded Educators Had Broad Impact

A major strength of Re:Learning was its ability to bring people together across various levels of the system within states — and across states — to share ideas, problems and results. Over the seven years of the formal partnership, the Re:Learning network developed into a valuable, reliable source of support for schools, districts and states, and provided like-minded educators with a range of opportunities to interact with and learn from one another.

These activities and opportunities served, among other things, to reduce the sense of isolation and disconnectedness that innovative individuals, schools and districts often feel. As the principal of an inner-city Philadelphia middle school described it, before joining the Coalition, "we were resigned to the fact that what was important to us wasn't important to anyone else."

Among some of the new structures, relationships and activities that reflect the influence of Re:Learning are the following:

- Statewide policy networks created in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida. These networks, which link legislative leaders, governors, chief state school officers, college and university officials, state board members, university-based policy centers, business leaders, state education department staff, professional organizations and others interested in improving education, are designed to foster a bipartisan dialogue and agenda-building process for educational improvement.
- Specific higher education-school district partnerships that produced change and improvement in teacher education and training programs. Such partnerships have been established in Pennsylvania, Maine and Arkansas.
- New approaches to the funding and delivery of professional development for teachers and administrators. In Delaware, for example, the state is handing over responsibility for professional development to regional, university-based research and training centers. In Missouri, the state has made possible the training of school practitioners to serve as coaches and facilitators to introduce new ideas and approaches to schools throughout the state.
- Regional centers that expand states' capacity to support school-level change and improvement. These centers, established in Missouri,

Arkansas and Maine, provide school staffs with advice, assistance and resources to help sustain and broaden their restructuring efforts, and serve as communications centers for networking within and between regions. Similar centers have been set up to support large urban areas in Re:Learning states, such as Philadelphia, Chicago and Fort Lauderdale. Such centers also are flourishing in some of the states and districts that did not join Re:Learning but are actively involved with the Coalition, for example, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky itself, the Greater Houston area, Los Angeles and San Francisco, New York City and Westchester County, Boston, New Jersey and Michigan.

These new structures and relationships offer some of the strongest possibilities for understanding and extending the lessons of Re:Learning as schools, districts and states move on to the next stage of reform.

Re:Learning created a powerful sense of possibility.

Chapter 5: Some Closing Thoughts

Re:Learning Had Widespread Influence

The Re:Learning initiative demonstrated remarkable staying power, managing to survive in the face of significant barriers and obstacles and, in many states, emerging as a coherent force for change and improvement. Even in states where the Re:Learning effort faltered, the influence of its ideas and principles is discernible in shifts in the focus, language and overall direction of education policy and policymaking.

A Powerful Sense of Possibility Endures

The ideas that informed Re:Learning are still compelling. The times are probably even more favorable. There is momentum and a growing research base upon which to build. And Re:Learning created a powerful sense of possibility.

"You can see the threads, the footprints of Re:Learning in all sorts of things we're doing," said a state department of education staff person in Delaware. Re:Learning is "one of the key contributive factors to opening up people's thinking — and changing the conversation about reform," said an Indiana Re:Learning leader. "Re:Learning is only one of the forces driving reform in our state, but it's played a crucial role," said a person involved in the Missouri Re:Learning effort. "What Re:Learning has done is get the pot real hot. It has connected a bunch of people who ordinarily wouldn't be, and given them a framework in which they can work together to improve schools."

Leadership and Shared Knowledge Are Crucial

At both the school and state levels, reform involves changing the dominant culture, a formidable task. Re:Learning provided lessons about what is needed to succeed. Two key points seem to be the need for strong leadership and the need to share what is now known:

1. For reform to persist, there must be a strong, stable core of leadership capable of engaging the public and maintaining momentum during times of transition. In most states, the commitment to Re:Learning

and the groups that were set up to provide leadership to the effort — notably cadres and steering committees — were troublingly vulnerable to political turmoil, policy shifts, financial crises and other vicissitudes.

2. There need to be better mechanisms for sharing information and knowledge about school improvement among teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents and the community at large. Stronger networks of schools will provide valuable support and information on what has worked and what has not worked in individual situations. Improved professional development for teachers will focus on the skills and knowledge needed to make the necessary changes in both the classroom and the school as a whole. The growing body of research will inform discussions on school improvement in both the "schoolhouse" and the "statehouse" as well as with the general public.

Re:Learning helped both ECS and the Coalition leaders and staff sharpen their thinking about how to help schools and states bring about the changes needed to improve student learning.

ECS and the Coalition Are Building on the Lessons Learned

Re:Learning helped both ECS and the Coalition leaders and staff sharpen their thinking about how to help schools and states bring about the changes needed to improve student learning. Even as the formal partnership was drawing to a close, each organization had begun to look at how to build on what it had learned.

The Coalition asked a group of practitioners from across the country to examine how it might reorganize itself to maximize the strength and vitality of its network of like-minded schools. Instead of operating out of a single national office in Providence, Rhode Island, the new organization is decentralized and member-driven, with a congress and executive board to provide direction, set priorities and speak with a national voice, and with regional centers to support schools in their efforts to implement the nine common principles. The centers foster information sharing and professional growth within and across regions, provide opportunities for networking and learning, and encourage the use of research findings and best practices.

For its part, ECS is helping states build coalitions of leaders to redesign education policies to meet their goals for improved student achievement. ECS provides information from current research and design efforts and creates forums for discussion of successful policies and practices. This helps educators, policymakers and members of the larger community broaden their understanding of the possibilities and pitfalls so they can

develop and implement strategies that build on what has been learned.

Both organizations continue to work to improve schools and schooling for the youth of America; they invite you to join them.

Sources and Acknowledgments

This report is based on a longer program review prepared by Carolyn Clinton and Suzanne Weiss for the anonymous funders who so generously supported the Re:Learning effort. It has been revised for the general reader interested in Re:Learning and the lessons that can be gleaned from this far-reaching initiative. All data and conclusions are based on the information available at the end of 1995 when the formal partnership between ECS and the Coalition ended, and the report to the funders was written. Sources include the following:

- In June 1995, a group of Re:Learning participants, Coalition and ECS staff, and the authors gathered in Denver for an in-depth and candid two-day discussion of the strengths and shortcomings of the initiative and the results it had produced in their states. The participants included school principals and teachers, state education department officials, school board members and others involved in state Re:Learning initiatives.
- During 1995, under the auspices of the Annenberg Institute of School Reform, independent researcher Margaret MacMullen located, compiled and analyzed nearly 150 studies of Coalition schools. These studies, all published since 1990, contained important new insights into the impact of using the nine common principles and similar approaches to redesign schools.
- In early 1994, ECS staff interviewed more than 50 people currently or formerly involved in the 11 states then part of Re:Learning about their experience and assessment of the effort. A state-by-state review of policy impacts also was conducted.
- Throughout the years of the project, the Coalition collected data on participating schools and the involvement of interested educators, and ECS maintained project files and field notes on policy development and leadership activities.

The report to the funders included two appendices that may be of interest to some readers; they are available on request from ECS or the Coalition. One was a profile of how Re:Learning evolved in each of the Re:Learning states (except Florida, which was the last to join); the collection illustrated how each state's Re:Learning initiative developed in its own way, depending on the political and bureaucratic realities within the state.

The second was a series of two-page vignettes of 22 Coalition schools in 11 states (not all involved in Re:Learning) written by Kathleen Cushman in 1994 and 1995; they describe how the Coalition's nine common principles were being implemented and with what success in a variety of school settings — public and private, traditional and alternative, large and small, from predominantly minority to predominantly white, in urban, suburban and rural settings.

Many people contributed vision, skill and initiative to Re:Learning and deserve acknowledgment. The anonymous donors, whose generosity totaled $12 million over a period of seven years, were joined by Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Charles A. Dana Foundation, Danforth Foundation, Gates Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Metropolitan Life Foundation and SBC Foundation in supporting Re:Learning activities.

Theodore R. Sizer and Frank Newman saw the potential synergy between the Coalition and ECS and brought the two organizations together. Edwin Campbell, Beverly Anderson Parsons, Robert McCarthy and Lois Easton provided leadership through ideas and action for Re:Learning staff from both organizations. That staff included: Jane Armstrong, Arleen Arnsparger, Judy Bray, Rexford Brown, Myra Cline, Deborah Clemmons, M. Van Dougherty, Susan Klein, Marjorie Ledell, Robert Palaich, Ron Rapp, Beverly Simpson, Patricia Smith, Stan Thompson and Carolyn Wyatt, plus others who contributed as needed while carrying out additional responsibilities.

Finally, thousands of students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, chief state school officers, state department of education staff, legislators and their staffs, and governors and their staffs found ways to work together to create excellence in their schools, and to learn from one another how good schools can be.

Bibliography

Bryk, A.S., and M.E. Driscoll. *High School as Community: Contextual Influences, and Consequences for Students and Teachers*. Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Secondary Schools, 1988.

Darling-Hammond, L., et al. *Authentic Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Felner, R.D., et al. "The Impact of School Reform in the Middle Years: A Longitudinal Study of a Network Engaged in Turning Points-Based Comprehensive School Transformation," *Preparing Young Adolescents for the 21st Century: Challenges for Europe and the United States*, R. Takanishi and D. Hamburg (Eds.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, in press.

Lee, V.E., et al. *Understanding High School Restructuring Effects on the Equitable Distribution of Learning in Mathematics and Science*. Madison, WI: Center on Organizing and Restructuring Schools, University of Wisconsin, 1995.

MacMullen, M.M. *Taking Stock of a School Reform Effort*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 1996.

McGreal, T., and M. Dodds. *The Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools: The First Five Years*, Prepared for the Illinois State Board of Education by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1994.

Muncey, D.E., and P.J. McQuillan. "Preliminary Findings from a Five-Year Study of the Coalition of Essential Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74 (6):486-489, 1993.

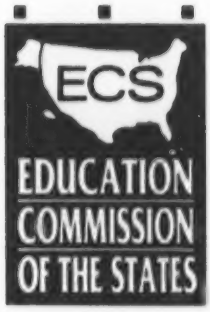
National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation At Risk*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983.

Newmann, F.M., et al. *Authentic Pedagogy and Student Performance*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995.

Newmann, F.M., and G.G. Wehlage. *Successful School Restructuring*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995.

Sizer, T.R. *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Wasley, P., et al. *The Puzzle of Whole School Change*, Providence, RI: Coalition of Essential Schools, in press.



Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, Colorado 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
http://www.ecs.org